

Leland 'Bill' Brake Testimony

Monday, May 1, 2006

Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management

Chairman and members of the Committee, Thank you for coming to Arizona to hold this public field hearing to review federal Farm Policy, and inviting me to speak.

My name is Bill Brake; I am a Rancher in Arizona and currently serve as President of the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association.

The Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management is going to have to make some difficult decisions and those decisions affect us of those in the west, particularly on rangeland.

We find ourselves in the position of being stewards of the land with lots of unsolicited help in managing those lands. All the help (demands) we receive from various agencies both federal and state as well as pressure from all kinds of private groups and individuals are requiring us to manage in a more and more expensive manner, without any benefit to us or the lands we manage.

The bottom line is we are trying to maintain open space in our state and we are the last ones left to do that. Let me use my ranch alone as an example. I ranch in Southern Arizona and I have 10,000 ac that I run cattle on. The land ownership in my ranch includes my private land, Federal Land and State School Trust land. Without all of the ownerships and the land the ranch would not be a viable ranching operation. Every day some group or one of the agencies or the towns nearby are telling me how I should manage my ranch for wildlife, for cattle, for insects, for fire, for recreation and for every other event that can possibly take place on that land.

The difference is that none of these people are putting up any cash to help meet their desires. They do it through regulations or laws. Let me give you an example. Recently Maricopa County, which includes the Phoenix metropolitan area and it's 2+ million people, passed a rule that they will no longer allow off road vehicle use because they can not achieve the air quality standards due to dust (in a desert) required by the EPA.

Therefore all those people who have the off road vehicles for recreation come to places like my ranch to play. This causes damage on the land I am required to manage for the Federal and State Government as well as my own.

That means I am not only managing for livestock, I'm now required to manage for ATV use as well. The costs just went up. I also have to manage for wildlife. Partly I do it because I enjoy wildlife, but I also have to do it because of the wildlife laws at the state and federal level.

I have developed and maintained waters, but fortunately this time I have paid only 50% of the cost because of the EQIP program through the USDA. This water benefits both livestock and wildlife. We have had 9 years of drought with more forecasted. I am the only one that goes out and turns that water on, maintains the equipment and makes sure it is available 365 days a year even though my cattle may be in the pasture only 60 days in that year. The only way I have been able to maintain a viable ranch on the diverse ownerships in Arizona is through the conservation programs such as EQIP. If you allow those programs

to expire with the new 2007 Farm Bill. I will then be back to paying 100% for the maintenance and improvements required on those lands. It seems to be obvious I will not be able to maintain a viable operation and will have to sell out.

When that happens everyone loses. The agencies do not and cannot have enough personnel to do the job, the public loses because there is no one left to do the job, and we all lose the open space we all treasure. If you think this is idle speculation look at the National Parks and the problems they are having with the land they hold. The ranchers in the west on intermingled lands are the last hope to keep the open spaces open, maintained and cared for.

This is why it is so very important you keep those programs going in the west and especially in Arizona. Without that money we can not maintain our livelihood and meet all the regulations and laws placed on us by our government and the demands of a growing population for open space and recreation.

Without that program as more and more demands are placed on the land and therefore my finances I am forced to consider other options, including selling out.

When I have to sell out because the costs and pressures I generally have only one buyer who will pay me for my land. That is someone who will cut it up into smaller pieces and build on it.

Then the open space is gone.

Thank you.